



Transmitted via email

January 29, 2004

MINNESOTA BULLETIN NO. 300-4-13

SUBJECT: LTP - Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

Purpose. To distribute preliminary information relative to 2004 WHIP allocation and policy for accepting applications.

Expiration Date. September 30, 2004.

The 2004 budget legislative process allocated \$42 million for WHIP. Minnesota's FY-04 allocation is \$450,000 available for producer contracts. Additional prior year funds may become available due to cancellations, terminations etc. These funds will be distributed as necessary at a later date.

The state office is in the process of finalizing the 2004 WHIP application, cost share docket, and scoring procedures. We intend to keep this process as similar to that used in 2003 as possible. Program changes that we know of include the use of ProTracts for tracking and approving 2004 WHIP contracts and the use of forms CCC1200 and CCC1245 for contract administration.

I am recommending that each Area receive a 2004 WHIP allocation based on their historic use of WHIP funds. The proposed break down of these funds, as a percentage of our state allocation, is as follows:

<u>Area</u>	<u>2004 WHIP Allocation</u>	<u>Base Funding Level</u>
1	10%	\$45,000
2	20%	\$90,000
3	20%	\$90,000
4	10%	\$45,000
5	10%	\$45,000
6	10%	\$45,000
7	20%	\$90,000

Area allocations will be set in ProTracts by the State Office. The area Conservationists may at their discretion, make county allocations in ProTracts.

Refer to the attached flowchart for application and contract processing. Applications will be accepted on a continuous basis. Those applications meeting a minimum ranking score of **120** points will be forwarded to the Area Office for review and final approval. The state office will no longer be directly involved in reviewing and approving applications. An amended WHIP Docket, Ranking Worksheet and "WHIP Application Checklist" (CPM, Part 517, Subpart MN517) will be developed and distributed to insure that field staff fully understand this year's procedure.

The unfunded backlog applications on file at the State Office have been returned to the Field Offices for future funding consideration. Field Offices may wish to enter valid eligible applications into Toolkit in anticipation of FY-04 funding allocation.

Direct questions you may have regarding the preliminary 2004 WHIP program guidance to your Area Resource Conservationist or Mark Oja, State Biologist.

WILLIAM HUNT
State Conservationist

Attachment

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APPLICATIONS ACCEPTED AND RANKED AT THE FIELD OFFICE.
Only applications scoring a minimum 120 points are eligible without prior State Conservationist approval.

Conservation plan developed in Toolkit.

CONSERVATION PROGRAM APPLICATION / CONTRACT DEVELOPMENT AT NRCS FIELD OFFICE UTILIZING PROTRACTS.

Eligible applications entered into PROTRACTS and given an application number pending final approval. FIPS-FY-sequential number. Ex) 105-04-001

Tentatively approved applications and supporting documentation forwarded to Area Office for review of compliance with WHIP goals and objectives.

Tentatively approved applications confirmed by Area Office. State Office issues contract number. Ex) 72-6322-FY- #####

Area Office allocates funding as necessary, to Field Office for approved applications.

Landowner and Designated Conservationist sign Conservation Plan and contract. Landowner initiates processing form SF-1154 for electronic deposit.

CCC-1245 "Practice Approval and Payment Application". Practice certification completed by Designated Conservationist and practice payment certification completed by the Area Conservationist per Area policy.

Landowner signs the CCC-1245. Field Office will mail/FAX the CCC-1245 to the State Office – Budget and Finance Section for payment scheduling.

January 2004

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: District Conservationist

**USDA ANNOUNCES COST SHARE FUNDS AVAILABLE THROUGH THE
"WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM"**

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a cost share program for people who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat on private lands. It provides both technical and financial assistance to help improve fish and wildlife habitat. "This is an opportunity for landowners to participate in a cost effective, voluntary program to improve fish and wildlife resources on their property," according to *(District Conservationist etc)*.

Some of the opportunities include ...

- Restoration and management of native grasses and wildflowers.
- Plant native trees and shrubs.
- Improve forestland and brushland.
- Streambank protection and fish habitat improvement.
- Establish and renovate farmstead shelterbelts.

Eligible participants include those individuals who own or have control of the land under consideration. All lands are eligible for WHIP, except; land currently enrolled in the Federal Water Bank Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, or the Emergency Watershed Easement Program.

"Participants with accepted applications agree to prepare and implement a wildlife habitat development plan," said *(District Conservationist)*. "The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers participants technical and financial assistance for the establishment of wildlife habitat development practices. USDA and the participant enter into a cost-share agreement. This agreement generally lasts from 5 to 10 years. Under the agreement, the landowner agrees to install and maintain the WHIP practices. USDA agrees to provide technical assistance and pay up to 75% of the cost of installing the wildlife practices. Landowners maintain control of the land, and no public access is required." WHIP does not provide rental income or purchase easements.

In addition, if the landowner agrees, cooperating Federal and State wildlife agencies and nonprofit or private organizations may provide expertise or additional funding to help complete a project.

Applications for WHIP technical and financial are accepted on a continuous basis, with approvals made periodically throughout the year. For more information about WHIP, and eligible wildlife habitat practices, contact the NRCS office at *(phone number)*, or on the World Wide Web at www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov.